

# CUPID BY THE KREMLIN WALL

**SETTING:** Soviet Union during the Great Purge of the 1930s; Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Moscow; a cross-country train in the Soviet Union.

**THEMES:** friendship; power; love; feminism; survival; Soviet repression.

**GENRE:** pseudo-detective; adventure; historical drama.

**ADAPTATION:** feature film; mini-series.

## SHORT SYNOPSIS:

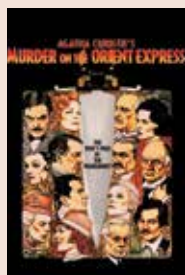
*Cupid by the Kremlin Wall* is a bold, cinematic story featuring a passionate, headstrong heroine, Musya Eristavi. In the Soviet Union in the late 1930s, a retired secret policeman is arrested and disappears. His wife Musya, a renowned revolutionary and fighter for women's rights, decides to travel to the Kremlin to discover his whereabouts. The flashback storyline reveals she was a friend of Stalin in their youth. During her three-day journey in a sealed train, Musya is surrounded by agents, and is entangled in a chaotic storyline, but she does not give up.

## MOVIE REFERENCES:

*A very long Engagement* (2004) a film by Jean-Pierre Jeunet

*Bullet Train* (2022) a film by David Leitch

*Murder on the Orient Express* (1974) a film by Sidney Lumet



## CHARACTERS:

**Musya Eristavi** – the protagonist, a headstrong female heroine chasing after justice

**Young Stalin** – we see him through Musya's memories of their young years together in Kutaisi

**Mr. Retinger** – an invisible character; the “person” Musya hopes to rescue

**Raisa Vasylieva** – another invisible character, who represents Musya's alter-ego; Musya uses her passport to board the train to Moscow

**Dr. Machavariani** – Musya's childhood hero who has been in love with her and who she meets on the train

**Comrad Zhora (George)** – a KGB agent

**Sergei Eisenstein** – the famous Soviet film director has a cameo role in the story

**Anteladze** – member of the Community Party Committee

**Shalva Tsereteli** – an agent, hidden under an alias

**Valerian Samkharadze** – the narrator

**Frolov** – a former Red Army officer, hopelessly in love with Musya



BOOK SAMPLE

## SUMMARY:

By the late 1930s, a great purge in the Soviet Union had destroyed any hope of utopian socialism or equality. Mr. Retinger, a former revolutionary and KGB officer of Latvian origin living in Tbilisi, suddenly disappears. The heroine of the story, his wife, Musya Eristavi, a renowned revolutionary, idealist and fighter for women's rights, sets off on her own to find him. She plans to travel to the Red Tsar's court to see Stalin himself.

Musya, the daughter of an eminent lawyer, is well-known for her rebellious character and has fought for women's rights and equality for many years as part of the socialist revolution in Georgia, believing in what she saw as humane, people-oriented policies. But her advocacy of gender equality has made her unpopular in a patriarchal society. She has begun to realize that utopian socialist ideas have vanished, giving way to Stalin's totalitarian rule.

Musya tries to keep her mission a secret and decides to travel under an alias, using the passport of an executed film actress, Raisa Vasilyeva, to obtain a train ticket.

Musya's father had been a staunch supporter of the revolution despite belonging to the aristocracy. The Eristavi family home had often provided a hiding place for the enemies of the Russian Empire including Stalin himself. In those days he was just another revolutionary known as Ioseb Jugashvili, or simply, Soso. Musya's past connection to the young Stalin becomes apparent as she writes him a telegram before boarding the train. She encodes the text with a message from old issues of an American magazine. As young adults, they shared an interest not just in human rights and social justice, but also arts and letters. Musya used to read the Saturday Evening Post to Stalin, who knew no other language.

The train's passengers are both historical and fictional. One of them, Kikava, appears a typical cheerful, feast-loving chap, but it soon transpires he is Shalva Tsereteli, an agent put there by Stalin and destined to play a decisive role in Musya's fatal journey. Tsereteli is an historical figure, he was head of Stalin's security at the 1943 Yalta summit.

Another chance passenger is Anteladze, a member of the Party Committee, who is smitten with Musya. His dream is to get her into an empty compartment, away from prying eyes. By a twist of fate, yet another passenger is Dr. Otar Machavariani, Musya's young sweetheart. He is a former aristocrat and a talented doctor who has been completely crushed by the Soviet Empire and become an alcoholic.

Frolov stands out among the colourful cast of characters. He is a former Red Army officer, hopelessly in love with Musya, Georgia and the Georgian language (without actually understanding a single word). Even more interesting is Sergei Eisenstein, the prominent film director, who lives in constant fear, seeing

security agents everywhere. He is restless and edgy. It's not long since his latest film *Bezhin Meadow* was banned, Soviet censors destroying copies even before they reached cinemas, and nearly costing him his life. He tries to be inconspicuous, acting like a law-abiding Soviet citizen. When he discovers an unknown woman traveling under the name of the dead actress he fears it might be a test of his loyalty, so he informs security.

Musya finds herself caught in a vicious circle of heroes and antiheroes. Shalva Tsereteli, the future head of Stalin's personal security, guards her anonymity as it turns out his task is to ensure Musya's safe passage to Moscow. But once the train stops in Rostov, a city of criminal gangs and thieves, blood is shed on the train: – Anteladze, Frolov and Dr. Machavariani are all wounded under different circumstances, but survive. Meanwhile, Musya is given an injection that renders her unconscious. She comes to her senses in Moscow, alone, dizzy, and with a headache. She has difficulty realizing exactly where she is as her vision is blurred, but she is picked up at the railway station, taken for a quick meal, and then to the Opera House. There she meets Stalin in his private Opera box. We see her talking to a man in the shadows, with light hitting his profile and mustache. The voice tells her that her husband is already long dead, scolds her for taking such risks but promises to do everything to keep her safe. She leaves the Opera but before the black governmental car drives her away, she hears: "Citizen, put your hands on your back!"

A sequel to the story, as well as a prequel, are in the making in which we will discover more about Musya's personality and her role as a femme fatale.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

The writer and screenwriter, Aka Morchiladze (pseudonym of Giorgi Akhvediani), is arguably the most widely recognized writer of contemporary Georgian literary fiction. He studied and later taught Georgian History at Tbilisi State University; as well as working as a sports journalist for a sports daily newspaper. Since 1998, Sulakauri has published more than thirty of his books. In 2005-2006 he was the producer and presenter of a popular TV program on literature. Today he is a narrator of a history documentary series on Georgian Public Broadcaster. Several films and plays have been based on his works. Morchiladze has won numerous literary prizes in Georgia. He was honorary spokesperson at the Georgia Guest of Honour opening ceremony at the Frankfurt Book Fair 2018. Morchiladze's works have been translated and published in numerous languages.